

The Right Returns to the Religion Well

Over the centuries, religion has cloaked hypocrisy – and it's getting a test again as President Trump and Senate candidate Roy Moore hide behind the Religious Right's self-interested sanctimony, write Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

In Babylon-on-the-Potomac recently, the brand new, \$500 million Museum of the Bible had its grand opening. Donald Trump did not attend, perhaps fearing a fate like the end of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* when the remnants of the Ten Commandments are unsealed, holy mayhem ensues and miscreants melt like candles.

Just a couple of blocks from Capitol Hill, the museum sprawls across eight floors and 430,000 square feet, giving visitors a chance to meet New Testament re-enactors, see a burning bush and Bibles that belonged to Babe Ruth and Elvis, walk through a replica of a village from the time of Christ, experience a motion ride called Washington Revelations and grab a snack at the Milk and Honey café (There's also a cafeteria-style restaurant called, you guessed it: Manna).

At the gift shop, you can buy key chains, hats and T-shirts, frankincense and myrrh body wash, a \$1,250 leather foot stool shaped like a rhinoceros (because rhinos were on Noah's Ark, of course) or a \$125,000 bejeweled pomegranate made of Jerusalem stone (the Song of Solomon: "I would give you spiced wine to drink from the juice of my pomegranates").

As the old joke goes, this is what God would do if He had money.

To be fair, by most accounts, the museum is well designed and executed, high-tech and state-of-the-art. Philip Kennicott, art and architecture critic for *The Washington Post*, wrote, "What it does well, it does as well or better than any museum in the country," but added:

"There... is a lot of slippage between [the museum's] claims that the Bible is enormously influential (which is indisputable) and that the stories it tells are fundamentally true (a claim disputed not just by atheists, agnostics, secular scholars and scientists, but also by billions of adherents of the world's other religions). Every resource of museum design and careful argumentation has been mustered to sweep up these unrelated ideas in one, big, overwhelming package."

Right-Wing Money

What has many observers far more concerned are connections among the new

attraction's principal funders and the right wing. Here its mission becomes suspect, more political than religious, although with the right wing, it is always difficult to separate the two, each possessing a will to dominate.

The Post describes a tangled relationship between the nonprofit museum, its corporate backer Hobby Lobby – the very rich, closely held craft store chain controlled by the Christian conservative Green family – and another principal backer the National Christian Foundation, a donor-advised fund “that supports key soldiers in the national battle for conservative Christian values.”

The foundation, self-mandated to “advance God’s kingdom,” has given millions to churches and others, counting among its grantees opponents of abortion and same-sex marriage. As for the billionaire Green family, their craft-store empire gained notoriety when it won a Supreme Court ruling allowing it to deny on religious grounds Obamacare coverage of contraception for its employees. Oh, and just in case you haven’t heard, they recently were fined \$3 million in fines and forced to turn over thousands of antiquities smuggled out of Iraq. (Down goes one of the commandments – see Deuteronomy 5:19.)

Those involved claim that the museum’s purpose simply is to expose visitors to the story of the Good Book and that its motives are nonsectarian and apolitical. Sure. But the opening gala was held at the Trump International Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue. The cheapest ticket was \$2,500 and apparently no collection plate was passed for the hungry and homeless, on the grounds, we presume, that it would be an unfair tax on the rich. Organizers claim that the choice of a venue had all to do with finding an available space large enough and nothing to do with currying favor with the owners of the inn.

Hobby Lobby CEO David Green backed Sen. Marco Rubio’s 2016 presidential candidacy but endorsed Trump in the general election, and his son, museum chair and Hobby Lobby president Steve Green, recently told the Christian Broadcasting Network, “We are seeing that the current administration with President Trump is a friend of religious freedom and has taken steps to strengthen and confirm that we are a nation that values the freedoms our founders gave us.”

Really? Trump? A friend of religious freedom? Why, according to televangelist and Trump buddy Paula White, he’s a man whose election kept us from being “on the verge of losing what we call religious liberties.” Without him and the prayers of believers, she said, “I believe the church in America would have been an underground church in five years.”

Trump as Savior?

Whoa! Donald Trump, the savior of oppressed Christians whom Democrats otherwise

would have banished to caves and dungeons, or fed to lions in the Coliseum? Apparently for Paula White and the like-minded, the first commandment – forbidding the worship of false gods – must be provisional. And to them, what Jesus told his followers – “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” – presents no hard choice, because Trump is one and the same.

The ninth commandment – forbidding false witness – they simply ignore. Donald Trump rode to power on the Birther Lie, and they cheered him on. During the 2016 campaign he couldn’t open his mouth without lying, and they cheered him on.

Yes, they cheered the man who said he had never needed to seek forgiveness, who reportedly cheated his contractors and vendors, who wants to slash programs for the poor and cut taxes for the rich, who plans to kick thousands of disaster and political refugees out of the country, who ignores famine in foreign lands, who wants to eradicate rules and regulations protecting the water and air of God’s green earth and who has surrounded himself with crony capitalists, grifters and predators. The man who scorns and dismisses allegations of his own sexual misconduct (See Deuteronomy 5:18) while calling for the election to the U.S. Senate of Roy Moore, the pistol-packing, homophobic, God-fearing demagogue who by many accounts lusted after teenagers and asked them out on dates. This to the applause of some of Alabama’s loudest Bible thumpers.

Speaking on an Alabama radio station, here’s how right-wing, anti-gay pastor Flip Benham justified Moore’s alleged predilection for teens: “He did that because there is something about a purity of a young woman, there is something that is good, that’s true, that’s straight and he looked for that.” A sentiment like that may be what prompted Walt Whitman to write: “‘O Bible!’ Say I, ‘What follies and monstrous barbarities are defended in *thy* name!’”

And here’s pastor Earl Wise from Millbrook Alabama, a Moore supporter who told the *Boston Globe*, “How these gals came up with this, I don’t know. They must have had some sweet dreams somewhere down the line. Plus, there are some 14-year-olds, who, the way they look, could pass for 20.”

“Not versions, but perversions,” said St. Jerome of the Bibles in his day.

Religion and Politics

One trembles at the numbers of right-wing Christians who resort to the Bible as if it were the Republican Party platform, who in their pursuit of reactionary and bigoted rectitude embrace Trump and his GOP allies no matter how reprehensible their behavior; who, like Trump mouthpiece Kellyanne Conway, seem to find it preferable to have a purported molester like Moore elected to the

Senate than a Democrat, and who quote scripture to overlook – even justify – Moore’s sins, going so far as to cite biblical references to the age difference of Joseph and Mary to give their candidate the all-clear.

All of this skin-crawling rationalization just to hold onto a single Republican seat in the Senate? Yes, because they can count on Moore to continue demonizing their gay brothers and sisters, to invoke the police powers of the state to force women to carry unwanted pregnancies, to cut taxes for rich donors and give churches the right to collect money from secret sources to carry on political activities without losing their tax-exempt status (it’s in the tax bill now before Congress; check it out).

In the words of historian of religion Randall Ballmer, “You have a movement that has so totally embraced a particular political party that it’s willing to go along with any outrage as long as it’s within the tent of party.”

Fortunately, there are Christians who say no. In Alabama itself, dozens of pastors signed a letter condemning Moore. It reads, in part:

“Even before the recent allegations of sexual abuse, Roy Moore demonstrated that his extremist values and actions are not consistent with traditional Christian values or good Christian character. He and politicians like him have cynically used Christianity for their own goals. But Roy Moore does not speak for Christianity, and he acts in ways that are contrary to our faith.”

To which North Carolina’s Rev. Dr. William Barber II, president of Repairers of the Breach, says amen. He deplors the fact that religious values “have been hijacked by extremists” who no more represent Jesus “than did the church authorities who backed slavery.”

Rev. Barber likes to quote Isaiah 10:1-4:

“Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches?”

Go to the Museum of the Bible in Washington. You can look it up.

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Comparing Tweeting Trump and Silent Cal

President Trump's tax-cut plan charts a bonanza for himself, his friends and his family, getting rid of taxes that bite the rich and leaving debts behind for future American generations to pay, say Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

Republican Calvin Coolidge, who in 1923 ascended to the presidency following the death of the corrupt and dunderheaded Warren Harding, was a man of few words. But some of the most famous of the few were, "The chief business of the American people is business."

Donald Trump, on the other hand, is often a man of many words, but rarely do they fit together to make a coherent sentence or complete thought. And we know for sure that he, too, believes the chief business of America is business, especially when it's *his* business. Oh, and Jared and Ivanka's, whose junkets on Dad's behalf appear to be merchandising missions for The Trump Empire. And his two safari-loving sons still holding forth from the family palace in New York, putatively running Pop's business while protected by a moat of barriers and security guards – take that, you huddled masses.

Coolidge was known as "Silent Cal." When a dinner party hostess told him, "You must talk to me, Mr. Coolidge. I made a bet today that I could get more than two words out of you," Coolidge replied, "You lose." The last thing our current president would be described as is silent. Trump can't stop tweeting and gibbering. And he doesn't like losers.

The taciturn Coolidge has been described as the most conservative president in American history. No one is quite certain what Trump is, as his opinions and moods shift depending on the last person to whom he has spoken or something he's just seen on *Fox & Friends* or heard from conspiracy theorist Alex Jones. They point rightward for sure, but as with so many conservative spokesmen these days, tinged with lunacy and utterly devoid of reason.

And yet there on the august pages of *The New York Times*, Charles R. Kesler, a senior fellow of the right-wing Claremont Institute, gushes:

"Mr. Trump remains the kind of conservative president whom one expects to say, proudly and often, 'the chief business of the American people is business.' Although Calvin Coolidge said it first, Mr. Trump shows increasing signs of thinking along broadly Coolidgean lines, and of redirecting Republican policies toward the pre-New Deal, pre-Cold War party of William McKinley and Coolidge,

with its roots in the party of Abraham Lincoln.”

Not Making Sense

Oh brother. Professor Kesler is projecting onto Trump a consistency of thought and belief that thus far seems unproven. Comparing him to McKinley is a stretch, and to Lincoln – well, absurd. Really now, does this remotely sound like Donald Trump?

“We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

On the one hand, Kesler’s adoration of Trump makes sense, given that last September it was the Claremont Institute that published a pseudonymous and now-notorious essay titled “The Fight 93 Election,” basically telling conservative Republicans that if they did not support Trump’s presidential candidacy, their world was doomed.

Why? Because Republican opposition to Trump, the author warned, “is the mark of a party, a society, a country, a people, a civilization that wants to die. Trump, alone among candidates for high office in this or in the last seven (at least) cycles, has stood up to say: I want to live. I want my party to live. I want my country to live. I want my people to live.”

Clunky pearls of wisdom from what passes today for conservatism. Where have you gone, George Will, now that they need you? Next thing we know, Ann Coulter will be running the Library of Congress.

Calvin Coolidge would never have gone for such histrionics. Yet it’s worth taking a moment to consider what did occur during his administration. His years in office were the height of “The Roaring ’20s” – a time of economic whoopee marked by wild financial speculation, extravagant bank loans and debt that contributed to the 1929 market crash and the Great Depression.

Coolidge himself was the epitome of frugality and respectability but like Donald Trump (who fancies himself “the king of debt,” by the way – a real conservative, no?) he favored enormous tax cuts, slashing spending, high tariffs on imports and cramming regulatory agencies with pro-business types.

Unlike Trump, he favored a low profile and as far as policy goes preferred inertia to action. Here’s what the noted columnist Walter Lippmann said at the

time: "This active inactivity suits the mood and certain of the needs of the country admirably. It suits all the business interests which want to be let alone... And it suits all those who have become convinced that government in this country has become dangerously complicated and top-heavy..."

At that last part, you can just see all Trump's plutocratic Cabinet members and advisors nodding their heads in vigorous agreement.

When he died, Calvin Coolidge's net worth was less than a million in 2016 dollars and he left it all to his wife Grace. Trump, who says his net worth may be as much as \$10 billion (how can we hope to know if he won't release his tax returns?), and his family are using the White House to make the family fortune multiply, as if the presidency were a perpetual goose laying golden eggs. Each news cycle brings more stories of conflicts of interest, and the tax cut plan announced on Wednesday is a sweeping bow to the rich.

"It is striking," Neil Irwin at *The New York Times* noted, how much the proposal favors Trump and his kin: "He is a high-income earner. He receives income from 564 business entities, according to his financial disclosure form, and could take advantage of the low rate on 'pass-through' companies. According to his leaked 2005 tax return, he paid an extra \$31 million because of the alternative minimum tax that he seeks to eliminate. And his heirs could eventually enjoy his enormous assets tax-free."

So conservatism under Trump and his cronies now running government has brought back a revised version of the gold standard: How much gold you can mine from privatizing the mother lode of government is the mark of your success.

No wonder Trump admires Vladimir Putin so much: They are the Midas and Ali Baba of autocracy. But conservatives they are not, unless to conservatives greed has become the coin of the realm.

One more thing: President Trump doesn't sleep much at night, reportedly getting about five hours of shut-eye (obviously, the cause is not a guilty conscience). President Coolidge loved to sleep, as much as twelve hours at a time. When he awoke from a White House nap he often would ask his butler, "Is the country still there?"

He meant it as a joke. Today, the question isn't funny.

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Trump's Troubling First Days

Donald Trump's presidency is off to a chaotic and troubling start with provocateur Steve Bannon pushing controversial policies and Trump closing ranks with the Right, say Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

The smell of a coup hung over the White House this past weekend, like the odor of gunpowder after fireworks on the Fourth of July.

In these first few days of the Trump administration we have witnessed a series of executive orders and other pronouncements that fly in the face of the Republic's most fundamental values. But Friday's misbegotten announcement of a ban on refugees from Syria and a 120-day ban on refugees from seven Muslim nations defies reason, pandering to a segment of the population festering with paranoia and rage.

Let's just look at some of the misrepresentations that litter Trump's declaration like garbage strewn across a sidewalk. Despite claims that the order is not about religion (!), it gives Christian refugees priority because, Trump wrongly said, "If you were a Muslim you could come in, but if you were a Christian it was almost impossible." The New York Times reports that, "In fact, the United States accepts tens of thousands of Christian refugees. According to the Pew Research Center, almost as many Christian refugees (37,521) were admitted as Muslim refugees (38,901) in the 2016 fiscal year."

Trump went on to say that in Mideast war zones, "Everybody was persecuted, in all fairness – but they were chopping off the heads of everybody, but more so the Christians." Again the facts: The Washington Post notes that "Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war and the rise of the Islamic State, many more Muslims than Christians have been killed or displaced because of the violence."

What's more, The New York Times editorial board observed, "The order lacks any logic. It invokes the attacks of Sept. 11 as a rationale, while exempting the countries of origin of all the hijackers who carried out that plot and also, perhaps not coincidentally, several countries where the Trump family does business."

Add to all this the haste and hurry, the sloppiness of preparation and apparent lack of prior review by qualified attorneys and affected government agencies, the chaos and pain created by its sudden, thoughtless implementation and the fuel this will doubtless add to the propaganda of the very same radical Islamic terrorists the executive order is supposed to keep out of the country. What Trump did makes little or no sense, and the way he did it was an insult to due process.

Immigration Decree

The President's decree on immigration is the act of a self-assumed Caesar – a Peronista strongman, wielding power like a blunt instrument with no regard for the short- or long-term consequences on fellow human beings or other nations. The courts have countered him for the moment on some provisions, but the stay is temporary. And Trump will soon be replacing more than 100 federal judges, all in his image, no doubt, like mannequins in a store window.

Oddly enough, while it seems clearer than ever that Donald Trump has never really read the U.S. Constitution, he may have inadvertently picked up a wrong idea or two from the Declaration of Independence. Among the Founders' grievances against King George III was that the monarch was "obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners" and "refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither."

Does it come as any surprise that with his refugee ban Trump favors a ban that sounds more like it came from tyrannical old King George than leaders of the American Revolution? No wonder he leaped at the invitation extended by the U.K.'s Prime Minister Theresa May last week to dine with Queen Elizabeth. Next thing you know the gilded letters T-R-U-M-P will grace Downton Abbey. You can imagine dreams of reviving old royal traditions like primogeniture jitterbugging in his head – otherwise, what's the use of having three sons if not so at least one of them can inherit the gilded throne? (Sorry, Ivanka and Tiffany.)

But we digress. Let's also not forget Trump's ludicrous feud with Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, Trump's childish obsessions with voter fraud and crowd size at his inauguration, his failure to mention 6 million Jews when saluting International Holocaust Remembrance Day and still, the never-ending tweets.

Washington Post columnist Ruth Marcus got it right: "You don't have to disagree with Trump's policies to be rattled to the core by his unhinged behavior. Many congressional Republicans privately express concerns that range from apprehension to outright dread." Which raises another question: Why do GOP lawmakers remain so publicly cowed? Is it because they cherish their party's

power more than they do America's principles?

The Rise of Bannon

Now the new president has placed his spooky senior counselor Steve Bannon on the National Security Council. This is a man so far to the right he called William Buckley's *National Review* and William Kristol's *The Weekly Standard* "both left-wing magazines." During his reign as chief of *Breitbart News*, he tolerated racist and sexist attitudes, and announced to a real journalist, "I am a Leninist." He went on to explain: "Lenin wanted to destroy the state, and that's my goal, too. I want to bring everything crashing down, and destroy all of today's establishment."

At least until the President gets fed up with the attention Bannon's receiving and fires him, the gruesome twosome appear to have settled on their mode of governance: Trump does the theatrics, Bannon does the policy. Bannon writes the executive orders, Trump signs them.

With all this instability, it's not surprising that not only progressives but also thoughtful conservatives already have had it with the President. Here's neo-con Eliot Cohen in *The Atlantic*: "Trump, in one spectacular week, has already shown himself one of the worst of our presidents, who has no regard for the truth (indeed a contempt for it), whose patriotism is a belligerent nationalism, whose prior public service lay in avoiding both the draft and taxes, who does not know the Constitution, does not read and therefore does not understand our history, and who, at his moment of greatest success, obsesses about approval ratings, how many people listened to him on the Mall and enemies. He will do much more damage before he departs the scene, to become a subject of horrified wonder in our grandchildren's history books."

At *Washington Monthly*, Martin Longman agreed. "Cohen and I couldn't be more different in our personal politics or our foreign policy priorities," he wrote, "and yet we're singing from the exact same hymnal on Trump. ... I honestly do not think this country can endure a four-year term of Trump as our president, and the prospects for worldwide calamity are so great that I can't avoid saying very radical sounding things about where we stand and what must be done."

Those "things" could be impeachment or implementing Section 4 of the 25th Amendment to the Constitution, the one that says that if it's determined that the President "is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office, the Vice President shall immediately assume the powers and duties of the office as Acting President."

Ladies and gentlemen, we are already in the midst of a national emergency. The

radical right – both religious and political – have been crusading for 40 years to take over the government and in Trump they have found their rabble-rouser and enabler. They intend to hallow the free market as infallible, outlaw abortion, Christianize public institutions by further leveling the “wall” between church and state, channel public funds to religious schools, build walls to keep out brown people and put “America first” on the road to what Trump’s nominee to be Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, has called “God’s Kingdom.”

You can see in the chaos a pattern: the political, religious and financial right collaborating to move America further from the norms of democracy with the triumph of one-party, one-man rule. There’s never been anything like it in our history. But many in the media are catching on, which explains the strategy Trump and his pack have adopted to discredit journalists, as Bannon tried last week when he proclaimed that the media “should keep its mouth shut.”

That’s not going to happen. Nor does it look as if the hundreds of thousands of protesters who marched the day after the inauguration and this past weekend at the nation’s airports to protest the refugee ban are about to stop either. A sturdy line of resistance is forming as the press, the people and patriotic lawyers join in fighting for our rights in the nation’s courts of justice and in the court of public opinion. Perhaps some brave Republican legislators, uncharacteristically demonstrating a profile in courage, will take a stand, too, against the despotic urges now roiling the Republic.

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<http://billmoyers.com/story/donald-trumps-mission-creep-just-took-giant-leap-forward/>

Trump’s Bait and Switch

Donald Trump has portrayed himself as a billionaire for the common people but his early presidency has the look of a flock of plutocrats feathering their own nests, write Michael Winship and Bill Moyers.

By Michael Winship and Bill Moyers

Throughout the campaign and the transition period leading up to the Inauguration, whenever Donald Trump was caught lying or tweeting something outrageous we were told by his acolytes that we should ignore his words and

instead pay attention to his deeds.

Kellyanne Conway, Trump's Queen of Bull, who has moved from campaign manager to White House counselor, actually has argued that what he says should not be taken literally, even telling CNN's Chris Cuomo, "You always want to go with what's come out of his mouth rather than look at what's in his heart."

Well, we're journalists, not cardiologists but okay, by that standard, President Trump's inaugural address was of a piece, much of it appealing to his core constituency – white workers and the middle class angry that they've been left out of the good times, as indeed they have been. But the speech was hollow rhetoric when compared to all the things Trump and his fledgling administration actually have done in just the last few weeks and hours.

"Today, we are not merely transferring power from one administration to another or from one party to another," Trump declared. "But we are transferring power from Washington, DC, and giving it back to you, the people.. The establishment protected itself but not the citizens of our country. Their victories have not been your victories. Their triumphs have not been your triumphs."

Fine, we'll do as Kellyanne Conway recommends. Rather than heed the rhetoric we'll look at his deeds and try to plumb the depths of his tiny heart. Truth is, Donald Trump has surrounded himself with many of the very elitists responsible for the plight of those everyday people he promised never to forget. The establishment he decried in his speech is front and center; six Goldman Sachs alumni alone already are in his administration, including Treasury Secretary-designate Steve Mnuchin, the man who parked a hundred million dollars in an offshore account and forgot to tell the Senate about it (we're not making this up).

High IQ or Net Worth?

Trump bragged Thursday night about the collective high IQ of his Cabinet but the real number that's troubling, as the website Quartz noted last month, is that the first 17 people he named to the Cabinet or Cabinet-ranking posts "have well over \$9.5 billion in combined wealth. ... This collection of wealth is greater than that of the 43 million least wealthy American households combined."

Let that sink in. Those first 17 people plucked by Trump to help him govern have more wealth "than over one-third of the 126 million households total in the US. Affluence of this magnitude in a US presidential Cabinet is unprecedented."

How about billionaire Wilbur Ross firing an undocumented household staff member to avoid being embarrassed when Trump picked Ross as Secretary of Commerce? Could it be he suddenly developed an interest in immigration policy?

Or Labor Secretary-designate Andrew Puzder, CEO of Carl's Jr. and Hardee's restaurants, his profits built on cutting corners and paying workers the lowest wages possible. Unless he has suddenly developed the common touch, it's not likely he'll be a robust advocate for blue- and white-collar workers.

Or Education Secretary-designate Betsy DeVos, whose confirmation hearings this past week revealed she knows almost nothing about public education – which, by the way, she doesn't believe in – but whose lack of credentials pale in importance beside the more than \$20 million she and her family have given to Republican candidates at the federal level, including many of the senators who will vote for her confirmation.

And how about Trump himself – stopping his inaugural parade to get out of his limousine in front of his DC hotel, of course – but so far failing to keep his promise last week that by Jan. 20 he would transfer complete control of his businesses? According to Pro Publica's Derek Kravitz and Al Shaw, none of the required documents have been filed.

No time for that, apparently, but plenty of time during his first hours in office to eliminate a climate change page on the White House website and replace it with attacks on the “burdensome” regulation of the energy industry – exactly what the global warming giants of fossil fuel sought to achieve with their campaign contributions. The new president already has forgotten those ordinary people out there experiencing the erratic weather brought on by climate change, many of them watching the waters rise around their homes and small businesses. Perhaps Trump plans to build them an ark.

Hitting Homeowners

Speaking of everyday people: If you're one of the homeowners struggling to make ends meet, some of the people Trump pledged in his inaugural address to defend, consider this as well: One of his first executive orders Friday suspended his predecessor's plan to decrease insurance premiums on Federal Housing Administration mortgages, a move Obama intended to help stabilize the housing market. Congratulations – if you're one of those mortgage holders, you've been Trumped!

“A punch in the gut to middle-class buyers” – that's how it was described by Sarah Edelman, director of housing policy at the Center for American Progress. “With mortgage interest rates already on the rise, reversing the FHA's move to cut insurance premiums in fact puts the dream of homeownership farther out of reach for millions of hardworking Americans.”

Contrast that cheapskate move with the money being spent on Trump's big

inaugural weekend. Nicholas Fandos at *The New York Times* reported last week that, “All told, the group planning the inaugural festivities says it has raised more than \$100 million, which would be nearly double the record for an inauguration, with much of it coming in six- and seven-figure checks from America’s corporate suites.” That includes a million bucks from Boeing and half a million from Chevron. A small price to pay for the kind of influence and thinly veiled bribery that are sure to characterize the Trump years.

“We will make America wealthy again,” Trump bellowed in his speech – he just didn’t say that the wealth won’t be shared. Fact is, “the forgotten men and women of our country” whom Trump addressed in the speech don’t have a chance against the army of influence peddlers with whom the new president already has surrounded himself.

For example, it was announced on Thursday that 13 – yes, 13 – lawyers from the high-powered law firm of Jones Day will be moving to top positions in the administration, seven of them at the White House alone. It’s s “a ton of top jobs” for one Washington firm, as David Lat of the website *Above the Law* put it: “This is very good news for Jones Day and the lawyers remaining at the firm. It’s great for the firm’s prestige, *and it also means that JD lawyers will be eagerly sought after by clients with issues pending before their former colleagues.*” (italics added).

This must be what they mean by “draining the swamp” – they just divert it over to the White House.

Fabulous Wealth

A pall of contradiction hung over the whole ceremony Friday – between the rhetoric aimed at those millions of working people and middle-class Americans to whom Trump said he was talking and the fabulous wealth concentrated in his personal and official circles. Not once did he mention the words democracy, or equality, or even the Constitution.

And while the clergy who offered prayers frequently invoked the names of God and Jesus, no one disturbed the official piety by reminding the privileged and powerful gathered around the new president that Jesus told his followers, “I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”

Or had said to a certain rich young man: “You lack one thing. Sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

Or had admonished his followers: “When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the

crippled, the lame and the blind.”

It wasn't that kind of affair, of course. Instead, a few hours after the swearing-in, President Trump, in another of his first official acts, signed an executive order moving forward the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, which could ultimately remove 18 to 32 million people from health insurance. Many of them presumably voted for Trump. Not a few may now need a miracle to survive.

By the way, according to [Darren Samuelsohn at Politico](#), the end of the ACA would personally save our billionaire president “at least \$6.7 million” in Medicare taxes.

Let us pray. After we march.

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Resisting the Congressional Watchdog

Not that political corruption doesn't happen with divided government, but with Republicans controlling all three branches, the prospects for more Abramoff-type scandals rise, warn Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

Mark Twain noted that man is the only animal that blushes – or needs to. He also believed that “public office is private graft.” Those two observations from our greatest and most sagacious humorist intersected with a bang on Capitol Hill Monday night, when the bright lights of the Republican House Conference met in secret behind closed doors at the end of the New Year's holiday.

They tried to vote themselves an especially tasty treat: eviscerating the independent Office of Congressional Ethics (OCE). That's the office created in 2008 in the wake of the Jack Abramoff scandal and the placement of three congressmen behind bars. The conference voted to absorb it into the House Ethics Committee. In other words, they wanted to weaken OCE and put it under the control of some of the very folks the office is charged with investigating for

possible influence peddling and other assorted mischief.

If the conference had its way, OCE would wind up having all the clout of the token student representative on your local board of education, giving unscrupulous legislators freedom to rob the public blind without fear of exposure.

But a funny thing happened on the way to congressional visions of new secret bank accounts in the Cayman Islands. The public can become like sheep when the shepherd is a demagogue, but when the public is outraged over outright unfairness and chicanery, it can roar like a lion. Once word of the vote leaked out, phone calls, emails and social media recriminations from all points of the political spectrum began flooding the sacred halls of the House of Representatives, which was once called The People's House before it became the predator's lair.

Talk about embarrassment. Imagine this new Congress, pledged to "drain the swamp," taking as its first action a rule that in effect would have helped make the swamp part of the National Park Service.

The nonpartisan Project in Government Oversight (POGO), declared that OCE needed "to be strengthened and expanded – not taken out back and shot in the middle of the night." So the GOP conference fled into another closed-door session and changed its mind. We were only kidding, they said. The Office of Congressional Ethics is alive and well – until the next time we try to kill it.

Just before the meeting, our august President-elect bestowed the Congress with two of his imperial tweets. "With all that Congress has to work on, do they really have to make the weakening of the Independent Ethics Watchdog, as unfair as it," read the first, followed by, "... may be, their number one act and priority. Focus on tax reform, healthcare and so many other things of far greater importance! ?#DTS."

DTS stands for Drain the Swamp, of course, although we're sure many of our progressive brethren would prefer bawdier acronyms involving the President-elect himself. Nonetheless, many are claiming it was these very dispatches from fearless leader that turned the vote around. But read his words carefully: He's more concerned about bad timing; he has no great love for the OCE.

In fact, shortly before the tweets, his amanuensis Kellyanne Conway was telling George Stephanopoulos on *Good Morning America* that "gutting it doesn't mean there won't be a mechanism" – just that there had been "overzealousness in some of the processes over the years."

Most members of the House agree it was the public outcry that swiveled those

usually obdurate minds on Capitol Hill; Trump merely once again displayed his ability to jump on the prevailing public sentiment or someone else's success and ride it to vainglory, like the story of the French revolutionary John F. Kennedy liked to tell: There go my people, the revolutionary said. I must find out their destination so I can lead them.

Beware the Congress

In the end, what this New Year's imbroglio tells us is three things. First, it's a reminder once again of the mediocre caliber of too many of the men and women running for the House and Senate these days.

All too often, people of public spirit who would make ideal candidates are discouraged from running by the horrors of perpetual fundraising – the vise of money in politics – not to mention the spotlight shone on every small detail of their personal and professional lives. Many of the people who wind up taking the bit and running are soulless empty suits, in it for the power and the payoffs during and after tenure. Or they're already rich in the first place.

Which leads us to the second thing: venality, so often hand-in-hand with mediocrity. All indications are that our incoming president regards the White House as a pirate galleon built to increase his family's trove of plunder many fold, and the notion seems to be rubbing off on Congress. New York Times columnist Frank Bruni asked, "Is it any wonder that House Republicans felt OK about trying to slip free of some of their own ethical shackles, no matter how ugly the optics? ...

"It's the tone that Trump has set and the culture that he's creating. He operates with an in-your-face defiance, so these House Republicans did, too. He puts his own desires and comfort first, so they reserved the right to do the same. With more than a few of his Cabinet picks, he demonstrated little sense of fidelity to what he promised voters and even less concern about appearances. House Republicans decided to treat themselves to a taste of that freedom."

Third, we have to keep ever vigilant. Other anti-democratic measures inserted in the same rules package slipped past the public. The first imposes a fine on House members taking photos or video in the chamber – a petty, vindictive, retroactive slap to those lawmakers who last June sat-in to protest Congress' refusal to take action on gun control. You'll recall that after Republicans quickly adjourned and cut off the C-SPAN cameras, the protesting members, led by Rep. John Lewis, the civil rights legend, used their cell phones to send out video and keep the story alive.

Even worse, the new rules allow not just members of Congress to subpoena and

question officials and citizens; it extends that fearsome power to staff members, opening the door to witch hunts and persecutions that could make Benghazi and Clinton's emails seem like a stroll in the park. Rep. Louise Slaughter, D-New York, ranking member of the House Rules Committee, said, "Freely handing out the power to compel any American to appear, sit in a room, and answer staff's invasive questions on the record – without members even being required to be present – is truly unprecedented, unwarranted and offensive."

Every battle won't be won. Nonetheless, the public DID manage to keep the House GOP from surreptitiously murdering the Office of Congressional Ethics, and that's proof we can make a difference if we keep the pressure on and hammer home our resistance and opposition when democracy and liberty are threatened.

The problem, neatly summarized as usual by Mark Twain, is that, "To lodge all power in one party and keep it there is to insure bad government and the sure and gradual deterioration of the public morals." This week, we got a vigorous, healthy and inspiring reminder that protest matters. Keep that in mind as the perfidies unfold this year under the one-party monopoly that will soon control our federal government.

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Are US Presidential Debates Worthless – or Less?

The U.S. news networks are building up the suspense for the first presidential debate between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, but odds are it will be another hyped-up TV disgrace, say Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

Let's call the whole thing off. Not the election, although if we only had a magic reset button we could pretend this sorry spectacle never happened and start all over. No, we mean the presidential debates – which, if the present format and moderators remain as they are, threaten an effect on democracy more like Leopold and Loeb than Lincoln and Douglas.

We had a humiliating sneak preview Sept. 7, when NBC's celebrity interviewer Matt Lauer hosted a one-hour "Commander-in-Chief Forum" in which Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump spoke with Lauer from the same stage but in separate interviews.

The event was supposed to be about defense and veterans issues, yet to everyone's bewilderment (except the Trump camp, which must have been cheering out of camera range that Lauer was playing their song), Lauer seemed to think Clinton's emails were worthy of more questions than, say, nuclear war, global warming or the fate of Syrian refugees.

Of course, that wasn't a debate per se but neither are the sideshows that we call the official debates, even though the rules put in place by the nonprofit Commission on Presidential Debates are meant to insure a certain amount of fairness and decorum – unlike the train wreck of "debates" during the primary season, which were run solely by the parties and media sponsors with no adult supervision.

But despite the efforts of the commission, the official presidential debates coming up also are dominated by the candidates and the media, and therein lurk both the problems and the reasons to scrap this fraudulent nonsense for something sane and serious.

A little history: From 1976, when President Gerald Ford faced off against Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter, the three presidential debates and one vice presidential debate were administered by the League of Women Voters, which did an admirable job under trying circumstances.

But then, as historian Jill Lepore writes in an excellent *New Yorker* article on the history of presidential debates, the Reagan White House wanted to wrest control from the League and give it to the networks. According to Lepore:

"During Senate hearings, Dorothy Ridings, the president of the League of Women Voters, warned against that move: 'Broadcasters are profit-making corporations operating in an extremely competitive setting, in which ratings assume utmost importance.' They would make a travesty of the debates, she predicted, not least because they'd agree to whatever terms the campaigns demanded. Also: 'We firmly believe that those who report the news should not make the news.'"

Collapse of the Old Debates

Ridings's prescience proved correct and then some. In 1988, the League pulled out of the Bush-Dukakis debates, declaring in a press release, "It has become clear to us that the candidates' organizations aim to add debates to their list of campaign-trail charades devoid of substance, spontaneity and answers to tough

questions. The League has no intention of becoming an accessory to the hoodwinking of the American public.”

Walter Cronkite agreed. That same year, he wrote, “The debates are part of the unconscionable fraud that our political campaigns have become. Here is a means to present to the American people a rational exposition of the major issues that face the nation, and the alternate approaches to their solution. Yet the candidates participate only with the guarantee of a format that defies meaningful discourse. They should be charged with sabotaging the electoral process.”

But as Ridings said, it’s not just the candidates involved in this criminal hijacking of discourse. The giant media conglomerates – NBCUniversal (Comcast), Disney, CBS Corp., 21st Century Fox, Time Warner – have turned the campaign and the upcoming debates into profit centers that reap a huge return from political trivia and titillation. A game show, if you will – a farcical theater of make-believe rigged by the two parties and the networks to maintain their cartel of money and power.

“Debating,” Jill Lepore writes, “like voting, is a way for people to disagree without hitting one another or going to war: it’s the key to every institution that makes civic life possible, from courts to legislatures. Without debate, there can be no self-government.”

But the media monoliths have taken the democratic purpose of a televised debate – to inform the public on the issues and the candidates’ positions on them – and reduced it to a mock duel between the journalists who serve as moderators – too often surrendering their allegedly inquiring minds – and candidates who know they can simply blow past the questions with lies that go unchallenged, evasions that fear no rebuke and demagoguery that fears no rebuttal.

Remember that it was CBS CEO Leslie Moonves who whooped about the cash to be made from the campaign, telling an investors conference in February, “The money’s rolling in and this is fun. I’ve never seen anything like this, and this going to be a very good year for us... Bring it on, Donald. Keep going. Donald’s place in this election is a good thing.”

Oh, yes, good for Moonves’ annual bonus, but good for democracy? Don’t make us laugh. Elaine Quijano of CBS News will be moderating the vice presidential candidates’ debate on Oct. 4, with Moonves looking over her shoulder.

Fellow Celebrities

Remember, too, that both Lauer and Trump are NBCUniversal celebrities who have earned millions from and for the networks. (Vanity Fair magazine even reported

that NBCUniversal boss Steve Burke had spoken hypothetically with Trump about continuing *The Apprentice* from the White House.)

Moderating the first presidential debate on Sept. 26 is NBC anchorman Lester Holt, a nice and competent fellow, but facing the same pressure as his fellow teammate Matt Lauer to not offend their once-and-possibly-future NBC star Donald Trump.

And remember that Anderson Cooper of Time-Warner's CNN, the all-Trump-all-the-time network, and Martha Raddatz of Disney's ABC News will anchor the second presidential debate (to her credit, Raddatz did a good job during the 2012 vice presidential debate) – and that the final, crucial close encounter between Trump and Clinton will be moderated by Chris Wallace of Fox, the very “news organization” that joined with Donald Trump to gleefully spread the Big Lie of Birtherism that served Trump so well with free publicity (and Fox so well with ratings) and that Trump now conveniently and hypocritically repents.

We wait breathlessly to see if during that debate Wallace inquires of Trump: “Did you really believe that lying about Barack Obama's birth was good for the country?” And: “What is your source for saying Hillary Clinton started the rumor that Obama was not born in America?” And: “How do we know you won't change your mind again and raise further doubts about whether the president is an American?”

And – to pick up on a suggestion from *The Washington Post's* David Fahrenthold, who has been reporting on Trump's charitable giving – or lack thereof: “Mr. Trump, will you now follow through on your promise to donate \$5 million to charity once you were given proof that President Obama was born in the United States? What charity do you have in mind? One of your own, perhaps?”

Wallace has already admitted he is in no position to hold Trump accountable for the lies he tells in the “debate” – that “it's not my job” to fact check either Trump or Clinton during the course of their appearance with him. That should be pleasing to Roger Ailes, who was fired as head of the Fox News empire for scandalous sexist behavior but who is now giving Trump debate tips.

Wallace is on record saying how much he admired and loved Ailes, to whom he owes his stardom at Fox – “The best boss I've had in almost a half a century in journalism,” Wallace said.

Such conflicts of interest at the core of the debates reminds us of what Woody Allen said back in one of his earlier, funnier films – that the whole thing is a travesty of a mockery of a sham of a mockery of a travesty of two mockeries of a sham.

And why are we so complacent about the hijacking of our political process – that

it has descended to this level where the two parties and the media giants pick as the only surrogates of the American people the minions of an oligarchic media riddled with cronyism and conflicts of interest?

Scrap the Debates

So yes, scrap the debates as they are and rebuild. Even with a few days left until the first one there's time to call everyone together, announce that our democracy deserves better and change the rules.

John Donvan of ABC News, moderator of public broadcasting's excellent *Intelligence Squared US* debates, has been making the media rounds urging that the debate format be changed to Oxford rules – to formally argue resolutions like “Resolved: The United States Should Withdraw from NATO,” in which the candidates would make brief opening and closing statements and in the time remaining question one another about the issue at hand, under strict time guidelines. At Change.org, 60,000 have signed a petition urging this be done.

You have to wonder what would happen if those 60,000 and more turned up outside the first debate at Hofstra University on Sept. 26, exercising their constitutional right of assembly and demanding, not just urging, this better way.

Or why not put the League of Women Voters back in charge, with just the two candidates and a ruthless timekeeper on the stage insisting that they keep to stringent time limits and behave like human beings? If they don't, on their heads be it. The timekeeper could even pull the plug early if things got out of hand.

Which brings us to the # 1 Question: How can anyone keep Trump in bounds? He makes up the rules as he goes along. He is a pathological liar and overweening narcissist who, as [Josh Marshall at Talking Points Memo reminds us](#) in a chilling take on the man, has more than once hinted at the murder of Hillary Clinton.

Says the astute Marshall: “The salient fact about Trump isn't his cruelty or penchant for aggression and violence. It's his inability to control urges and drives most people gain control over very early in life. There are plenty of sadists and sociopaths in the world. They're not remarkable.

“The scariest have a high degree of impulse control (iciness) which allows them to inflict pain on others when no one is looking or when they will pay no price for doing so. What is true with Trump is what every critic has been saying for a year: the most obvious and contrived provocation can goad this thin-skinned charlatan into a wild outburst. He's a 70-year-old man with children and grandchildren and he has no self-control.”

Does anyone really believe a candidate so unstable can or will engage in serious debate? And if our first line of defense against his volcanic lies – journalists supposedly committed to truth – crumbles, how will we ever clean up the contamination?

Something's got to give. We can't go on like this. We can no longer leave the electoral process to the two parties or the media conglomerates with whom they're in cahoots. The stakes are too high.

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Democrats Adopt a More Progressive Tone

At the Democratic National Convention, some tough-guy/gal militaristic talk has prompted floor shouts of “no more war,” while most domestic policy rhetoric has been markedly progressive, say Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

Shoot if you must these old grey heads, but these two semi-qualified observers of the passing political scene watched Monday night's proceedings at the Democratic National Convention and saw past the heckles and opprobrium of the leather-lunged few.

Instead, we witnessed an evening of progressive rhetoric and thoughtfulness unseen on a big political stage since the days of William Jennings Bryan, Wisconsin's Fighting Bob La Follette, the Happy Warrior Al Smith and the crusaders of FDR's New Deal. Not to mention Hubert Humphrey, Jesse Jackson, Shirley Chisholm, and a host of others who though history kept beating the drums for ordinary people against the organized might of Big Money.

Progressive big hitters were out on the field Monday and they successfully swung for the fences. Michelle Obama, Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders were batting like the Yankees' legendary Murderers Row, aided and abetted by such powerful players as Representatives Keith Ellison and Raúl Grijalva, Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney and U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley.

Michelle Obama was elegant and forceful as she looked back at her family's years

in the White House and endorsed Hillary Clinton.

“I want someone with the proven strength to persevere,” she said. “Someone who knows this job and takes it seriously. Someone who understands that the issues a president faces are not black and white and cannot be boiled down to 140 characters. Because when you have the nuclear codes at your fingertips and the military in your command, you can’t make snap decisions. You can’t have a thin skin or a tendency to lash out. You need to be steady, and measured, and well-informed.”

Could anyone watching not feel a tingle down the spine as this remarkable woman traced the great arc of American history? We only prayed grandchildren were listening as she said that the story of America is “the story of generations of people who felt the lash of bondage, the shame of servitude, the sting of segregation, but who kept on striving and hoping and doing what needed to be done so that today, I wake up every morning in a house that was built by slaves? –? and I watch my daughters?– ?two beautiful, intelligent, black young women?– ?playing with their dogs on the White House lawn. And because of Hillary Clinton, my daughters ?– and all our sons and daughters? –?now take for granted that a woman can be president of the United States.”

Elizabeth Warren did what only she can do, deconstructing the charade that is Donald Trump.

“Trump thinks he can win votes by fanning the flames of fear and hatred,” she said. “By turning neighbor against neighbor. By persuading you that the real problem in America is your fellow Americans – people who don’t look like you, or don’t talk like you, or don’t worship like you... That’s Donald Trump’s America. An America of fear and hate. An America where we all break apart...”

“When we turn on each other, bankers can run our economy for Wall Street, oil companies can fight off clean energy, and giant corporations can ship the last good jobs overseas. When we turn on each other, we can’t unite to fight back against a rigged system. Well, I’ve got news for Donald Trump. The American people are not falling for it.”

And then the hour belonged to Bernie Sanders. As he endorsed Clinton, he was gracious in defeat: “I understand that many people here in this convention hall and around the country are disappointed about the final results of the nominating process. I think it’s fair to say that no one is more disappointed than I am. But to all of our supporters – here and around the country – I hope you take enormous pride in the historical accomplishments we have achieved.

“Together, my friends, we have begun a political revolution to transform America

and that revolution – Our Revolution – continues. Election days come and go. But the struggle of the people to create a government which represents all of us and not just the 1 percent – a government based on the principles of economic, social, racial and environmental justice – that struggle continues. And I look forward to being part of that struggle with you.”

Then and there, the old socialist from Vermont liberated Democrats to be the champions of everyday people again.

Choking on Big Money

If only – and it’s a big if – if only the party can liberate itself from the stranglehold of Big Money. For off camera, out of sight and (for the moment) out of mind, one could sense the corrupting presence of the lobbyists of corporate America, the bag men of special interests, and the mercenaries there in Philadelphia with hefty infusions of campaign cash eager to bring the Democrats down from the ramparts of *Les Mis* and back to cold, cynical earth.

Monday, we saw spirit and passion, ideas and aspirations, inspiring language, diversity (1,182 black delegates – as opposed to the GOP’s 18 – and 2,887 women), values, even the tears of Bernie’s supporters and yes, the willingness to join forces to defeat Trump.

But those progressive voices ringing out so beautifully that night are the very ones fighting to free their party from the grip of millionaires and billionaires while at the same time the Clinton forces embrace the one-tenth of one percent represented by the multi-billionaire and former Republican Mayor of New York Mike Bloomberg. He spoke at the convention on Wednesday night, part of the Clinton effort to give moderate members of the GOP another reason to dump Trump. Nonetheless, the optics are less than great.

We took time from the grace notes of unity and collaboration sounded at the convention to look over those Democratic National Committee emails dumped on the eve of the convention by WikiLeaks, communications that reveal just how low party fundraisers will stoop for cash, promising contributors access to the White House and other higher-ups in exchange for their donations.

In *The Washington Post* this week, Matea Gold wrote, “The leaked emails reveal the relentless art of donor maintenance that undergirds the system: the flattery, cajoling and favor-bestowing that goes into winning rich supporters. It’s a practice that the party fundraisers themselves often find dispiriting.”

To which Nicholas Confessore and Steve Eder at *The New York Times* added, “As is common in national politics, Democratic staff members kept detailed track of every dollar contributed by targeted donors, aiming to get each of the

wealthiest givers to 'max out,' or contribute the maximum legal amount to each party account. The biggest national donors were the subject of entire dossiers, as fund-raisers tried to gauge their interests, annoyances and passions."

Avarice is bipartisan, as has been seen at both this year's Republican and Democratic conventions. For the first time, both parties received no public money for their conventions so they were completely beholden to private funding. What's more, Democrats reversed previous policy and lifted a ban on corporate and lobbying dollars to pay for their big soiree.

"After those limits were lifted," Matea Gold noted, soon-to-be-former DNC Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz "and other top party officials showered corporate lobbyists with calls, emails and personal meetings seeking convention support and PAC contributions to the party, according to a spreadsheet logging the contacts." This year's sponsors include Lockheed Martin, Home Depot, AT&T, Xerox, Twitter, Microsoft and Facebook.

While in Philadelphia, according to Confessore and Eder, "Donors who raise \$1.25 million for the party – or who give \$467,000 – are entitled to priority booking in a top hotel, nightly access to V.I.P. lounges and an 'exclusive roundtable and campaign briefing with high-level Democratic officials,' according to a promotional brochure obtained by The Times."

And then there's this report by Megan R. Wilson at the Washington paper, The Hill: "Presumptive Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton has accepted more than \$9 million in bundled donations from registered lobbyists, while the DNC has rolled back the lobbyist bans that Obama put into place.

"'In 2008 and 2012, there was no integration with the [Obama] campaign,' said Al Mottur, a senior Democratic lobbyist at Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, adding that he would have liked to have helped. 'Now, the campaign is welcoming – they're open to us. That's why I've done as much work for her as I've done on her behalf.'"

It's an old story. Candidates seek the votes of citizens only to turn around and promise the only real access to donors. And once again representative government is disrupted because the winners so rarely govern as they campaigned. They can't, because they are tethered to the demands, claims and tendered IOUs of the rich and privileged.

That the system is so rigged has been a major theme of the Sanders campaign, and on Monday, it was reiterated by both Sanders and Warren as each called for the overturning of *Citizens United* and other court decisions that have flooded politics with money at a level beyond imagination.

In her acceptance speech Thursday night, Hillary Clinton doubtless will say similar things and praise the progressive gospel of campaign finance reform, professing to shun the appeasement of Wall Street – the big banks, hedge fund managers, and private equity oligarchs.

All well and good, but if her actions and her party's continue to prove otherwise, the rousing rhetoric of this week – and the historic nomination of the first woman as a presidential nominee – may fade to insignificance as an angry, disillusioned, and despairing public opens the door wide for the phony “I'm so rich I can't be bought off” gospel of Donald J. Trump. Caveat emptor.

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Trump's Midnight in America

Ivanka Trump portrayed her father as a can-do executive with a big heart, but then Donald Trump opened his mouth, spewing forth what sounded like a call for a police state, as Bill Moyers and Michael Winship marveled.

Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

The GOP's new big dog blew the whistle Thursday night for nearly an hour and a half and it was loud and shrill enough to reach the ears of every angry, resentful, disaffected white American. The tone was divisive, dark, dystopian and grim.

Here was the alpha dog of the von Trump family, baying at a blood-red moon that the hills are alive with the sounds of menace.

According to Republican presidential nominee Donald J. Trump, this land is rapidly becoming as bleak and dangerous as one of those twisted, vicious kingdoms in *Game of Thrones*, a place filled with violent crime and despair, a smoldering ruin overrun with foreigners out to take our jobs and terrorists bent on destroying our villages.

It's mourning in America. And only he can save us.

This has been his message all year: I alone can fix it. Remember his tweet on Easter morning? "Another radical Islamic attack, this time in Pakistan, targeting Christian women & children. At least 67 dead, 400 injured. I alone can solve."

He alone has the potion. He alone can call out the incantation. He alone can cast out the demons. It's a little bit Mussolini. A little bit Berlusconi. A little bit George Wallace. And a lot of Napoleon in a trucker's hat.

"I am not an ordinary man," Bonaparte once said." I am an extraordinary man and ordinary rules do not apply to me."

So he will do it all alone, this Trump. Until he has the U.S. military to carpet-bomb on his orders, and the nuclear codes at the ready beside his bed at 3 a.m., and the 101st Airborne at the southern border, ready to act – as long as Mexico pays for it.

This was a convention pledged to serve and protect the little guy, but as Rachel Maddow pointed out on MSNBC, it was officially addressed by five – count 'em, five – billionaires, including Trump and one, Silicon Valley's Peter Thiel, who has said that woman's suffrage was a bad idea and wrote in 2009 that "I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible." Boy, was he in the right place.

Thiel was one of the Thursday night speakers leading up to the official coronation of King Donald as the Republican Party's standard-bearer. Introduced by daughter Ivanka, who without a trace of irony lauded her dad's "kindness and compassion" (except of course for all those women he has verbally abused and minorities he has slandered and even the fellow candidates he mocked).

No Lies, Only Falsehoods

Trump announced, "Here, at our convention, there will be no lies. We will honor the American people with the truth and nothing else... I will tell you the plain facts that have been edited out of your nightly news and your morning newspaper."

But as Washington Post fact checkers Glenn Kessler and Michelle Ye Hee Lee noted:

"The dark portrait of America that Donald J. Trump sketched ... is a compendium of doomsday stats that fall apart upon close scrutiny. Numbers are taken out of context, data is manipulated, and sometimes the facts are wrong.

“When facts are inconveniently positive – such as rising incomes and an unemployment rate under 5 percent – Trump simply declines to mention them. He describes an exceedingly violent nation, flooded with murders, when in reality, the violent-crime rate has been cut in half since the crack cocaine epidemic hit its peak in 1991.”

He said 58 percent of young African-Americans are unemployed – and the dog whistle signals, you know what *that* means – but the number’s actually about half that. He insists we’re one of the highest taxed nations in the world – we’re nowhere near – and that we have “no way to screen” refugees, which is just not true.

The speech went on and on like that and the crowd inside the convention hall ate it up, their bitterness and frustration spurred on by Trump’s own sputtering, red-faced outrage.

The legacy of Hillary Clinton, he said, is “death, destruction and weakness.” She proposes “mass amnesty, mass immigration, and mass lawlessness.” As for Barack Obama, “The irresponsible rhetoric of our president, who has used the pulpit of the presidency to divide us by race and color, has made America a more dangerous environment for everyone.”

By the way, of the 2,472 delegates at the convention, only 18 of them were black, the lowest percentage in over a century, according to History News Network and the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. With Trump at the helm, Republicans will soon have purged their party of any memory of its own past. “Lincoln” simply will have been the name of a town car.

As columnist Eugene Robinson said about Thursday’s speech, “Frankly, this was a message, at least to my ears, to white America: Be afraid. I will protect you.” It’s not for nothing that as convention officials projected tweets from Trump supporters on the hall’s video screens during his speech, one of them turned out to be from a notorious white supremacist account.

Can anyone imagine Donald Trump breaking into *Amazing Grace* at the service for black worshippers in Charleston, South Carolina, gunned down in their church by a white supremacist? There certainly was not a grace note in his speech. And – sorry, Ivanka – not a single note of “kindness and compassion.” No touch of humility.

Watching, we could only think of Augustus, during the First Century B.C., in a time roiled by corruption and the wealth of empire, who terminated the government and installed himself as emperor, careful to preserve all the forms of the republic while dispensing with their meaning.

Or, as the less august, but funnier folks at The Onion [tweeted](#) while the smoke from Trump's cannonade lingered into the night, "Thanks for joining our live coverage of the RNC. This concludes democracy."

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A House Sit-in Against the Gun Lobby

Elevating the gun crisis to the moral level of the 1960s civil rights struggle, Rep. John Lewis led a House floor sit-in to demand a vote on a bill to restrict access to deadly weapons, write Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

On March 7, 1965, 25-year-old John Lewis, already a veteran of the Freedom Rides, Mississippi's Freedom Summer and Martin Luther King Jr.'s March on Washington, walked ahead of 600 civil rights activists as they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, on the first leg of what was meant to be a peaceful march for voting rights.

As they stepped off the end of the bridge, a posse of 150 state troopers and deputy sheriffs attacked them, wielding clubs, bullwhips and tear gas. Lewis was beaten to within an inch of his life. But he took the horrible pummeling of "Bloody Sunday" and survived to lead another march a week later. This time they kept going – all the way to the state capitol in Montgomery, 50 miles away.

Fifty-one years later, on the floor of the House of Representatives on Wednesday, John Lewis, now 76 and a member of Congress for nearly three decades, took another courageous and principled stand. Many of his Democratic colleagues joined him for a sit-in on the floor of the House chamber itself, the same kind of protest he and his fellow activists used so effectively during the 1960s.

This time they were agitating against one of the most grievous human rights horrors of all: the gun violence running amok in America, including the recent abomination of 49 deaths at that nightclub in Orlando, Florida. There have been nearly 100,000 gun deaths in the United States since the school murders in

Newtown, Connecticut, just three and a half years ago.

In Selma in 1965, television cameras sent pictures of what was happening on the Pettus Bridge around the country and a shocked American public took to heart how deep the wounds remained between black and white. On Wednesday, Republican House leadership, as cruel and cold-of-heart as those Alabama state troopers, gavelled the House out of session so the cameras of C-SPAN could not show the American people the courage of those House members sitting on the floor and telling the National Rifle Association and its bought-and-paid-for politicians to go to hell.

Despite the loss of television's probing eye, the demonstrators used social media like Facebook and Twitter to get out their story, putting their cell phones to good use and sending out photos and video of their action across the country and the world.

Lewis tweeted, "Sometimes you have to get in the way. You have to make some noise by speaking up and speaking out against injustice and inaction. #goodtrouble."

In a letter to Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan, Rep. Lewis and his colleague Rep. Katherine Clark asked, "What is this Congress waiting for? ...We stand with thousands of brokenhearted families who have not been served by this Congress and millions more who are counting on us to find the moral courage to do the right thing. We stand together in our refusal to sit by while this Congress abdicates its fundamental responsibility to protect American families from harm."

Once again the Republican leaders of Congress have been revealed for what they are: useful stooges of the gun merchants who would sell to anyone – from the mentally ill to a terrorist-in-waiting to a lurking mass murderer. And the Republican Party once again has shown itself an enabler of death, the enemy of life, a threat to the republic itself.

Today, John Lewis said, "The time is always right to do right. Our time is now." The heroism on the Pettus Bridge turned the tide against the inhumanity of segregation. Today's protest in the House of Representatives just might mark the beginning of the end of the gun industry's grip on American life and liberty.

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The Roots of Trump's Cruel Populism

Donald Trump's angry and ugly populism has roots going back to Jim Crow-era race-baiters and Cold War-era red-baiters, including Joe McCarthy's adviser Roy Cohn and his disciples, write Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

There's a virus infecting our politics and right now it's flourishing with a scarlet heat. It feeds on fear, paranoia and bigotry. All that was required for it to spread was a timely opportunity – and an opportunist with no scruples.

There have been stretches of history when this virus lay dormant. Sometimes it would flare up here and there, then fade away after a brief but fierce burst of fever. At other moments, it has spread with the speed of a firestorm, a pandemic consuming everything in its path, sucking away the oxygen of democracy and freedom.

Today its carrier is Donald Trump, but others came before him: narcissistic demagogues who lie and distort in pursuit of power and self-promotion. Bullies all, swaggering across the landscape with fistfuls of false promises, smears, innuendo and hatred for others, spite and spittle for anyone of a different race, faith, gender or nationality.

In America, the virus has taken many forms: "Pitchfork Ben" Tillman, the South Carolina governor and senator who led vigilante terror attacks with a gang called the Red Shirts and praised the efficiency of lynch mobs; radio's charismatic Father Charles Coughlin, the anti-Semitic, pro-Fascist Catholic priest who reached an audience of up to 30 million with his attacks on Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal; Mississippi's Theodore Bilbo, a member of the Ku Klux Klan who vilified ethnic minorities and deplored the "mongrelization" of the white race; Louisiana's corrupt and dictatorial Huey Long, who promised to make "Every Man a King." And of course, George Wallace, the governor of Alabama and four-time presidential candidate who vowed, "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever."

Note that many of these men leavened their gospel of hate and their lust for power with populism – giving the people hospitals, schools and highways. Father Coughlin spoke up for organized labor. Both he and Huey Long campaigned for the redistribution of wealth. Tillman even sponsored the first national campaign-finance reform law, the Tillman Act, in 1907, banning corporate contributions to

federal candidates.

But their populism was tinged with poison – a pernicious nativism that called for building walls to keep out people and ideas they didn't like.

The McCarthy Connection

Which brings us back to Trump and the hotheaded, ego-swollen provocateur he most resembles: Joseph McCarthy, U.S. senator from Wisconsin – until now perhaps our most destructive demagogue. In the 1950s, this madman terrorized and divided the nation with false or grossly exaggerated tales of treason and subversion – stirring the witches' brew of anti-Communist hysteria with lies and manufactured accusations that ruined innocent people and their families.

"I have here in my hand a list," he would claim – a list of supposed Reds in the State Department or the military. No one knew whose names were there, nor would he say, but it was enough to shatter lives and careers.

In the end, McCarthy was brought down. A brave journalist called him out on the same television airwaves that helped the senator become a powerful, national sensation. It was Edward R. Murrow, and at the end of an episode exposing McCarthy on his CBS series *See It Now*, Murrow said:

"It is necessary to investigate before legislating, but the line between investigating and persecuting is a very fine one, and the junior senator from Wisconsin has stepped over it repeatedly. His primary achievement has been in confusing the public mind, as between the internal and the external threats of Communism.

"We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty. We must remember always that accusation is not proof and that conviction depends upon evidence and due process of law. We will not walk in fear, one of another. We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason, if we dig deep in our history and our doctrine, and remember that we are not descended from fearful men – not from men who feared to write, to speak, to associate and to defend causes that were, for the moment, unpopular."

There also was the brave and moral lawyer Joseph Welch, acting as chief counsel to the U.S. Army after it was targeted for one of McCarthy's inquisitions. When McCarthy smeared one of his young associates, Welch responded in full view of the TV and newsreel cameras during hearings in the Senate.

"You've done enough," Welch said. "Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?... If there is a God in heaven, it will do neither you nor your cause any good. I will not discuss it further."

It was a devastating moment. Finally, McCarthy's fellow senators – including a handful of brave Republicans – turned on him, putting an end to the reign of terror. It was 1954. A motion to censure McCarthy passed 67-22, and the junior senator from Wisconsin was finished. He soon disappeared from the front pages, and three years later was dead.

The Roy Cohn Link

Here's something McCarthy said that could have come straight out of the Trump playbook: "McCarthyism is Americanism with its sleeves rolled." Sounds just like The Donald, right? Interestingly, you can draw a direct line from McCarthy to Trump – two degrees of separation. In a Venn diagram of this pair, the place where the two circles overlap, the person they share in common, is a fellow named Roy Cohn.

Cohn was chief counsel to McCarthy's Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, the same one Welch went up against. Cohn was McCarthy's henchman, a master of dark deeds and dirty tricks. When McCarthy fell, Cohn bounced back to his hometown of New York and became a prominent Manhattan wheeler-dealer, a fixer representing real estate moguls and mob bosses – anyone with the bankroll to afford him. He worked for Trump's father, Fred, beating back federal prosecution of the property developer, and several years later would do the same for Donald.

"If you need someone to get vicious toward an opponent," Trump told a magazine reporter in 1979, "you get Roy." To another writer he said, "Roy was brutal but he was a very loyal guy."

Cohn introduced Trump to his McCarthy-like methods of strong-arm manipulation and to the political sleazemeister Roger Stone, another dirty trickster and unofficial adviser to Trump who just this week suggested that Hillary Clinton aide Huma Abedin was a disloyal American who may be a spy for Saudi Arabia, a "terrorist agent."

Cohn also introduced Trump to the man who is now his campaign chair, Paul Manafort, the political consultant and lobbyist who without a moral qualm in the world has made a fortune representing dictators – even when their interests flew in the face of human rights or official U.S. policy. [**Editor's Note:** Roy Cohn was also the connection between President Ronald Reagan, an ally from the McCarthy era, and media mogul Rupert Murdoch. See Consortiumnews.com's "How Roy Cohn Helped Rupert Murdoch."]

So the ghost of Joseph McCarthy lives on in Donald Trump as he accuses President Obama of treason, slanders women, mocks people with disabilities, and impugns

every politician or journalist who dares call him out for the liar and bamboozler he is. The ghosts of all the past American demagogues live on in him as well, although none of them have ever been so dangerous – none have come as close to the grand prize of the White House.

Understandable Resentments

Because even a pathological liar occasionally speaks the truth, Trump has given voice to many who feel they've gotten a raw deal from establishment politics, who see both parties as corporate pawns, who believe they have been cheated by a system that produces enormous profits from the labor of working men and women that are gobbled up by the 1 percent at the top. But again, Trump's brand of populism comes with venomous race-baiting that spews forth the red-hot lies of a forked and wicked tongue.

We can hope for journalists with the courage and integrity of an Edward R. Murrow to challenge this would-be tyrant, to put the truth to every lie and publicly shame the devil for his outrages. We can hope for the likes of Joseph Welch, who demanded to know whether McCarthy had any sense of decency.

Think of Gonzalo Curiel, the jurist Trump accused of persecuting him because of the judge's Mexican heritage. Curiel has revealed the soulless little man behind the curtain of Trump's alleged empire, the avaricious money-grubber who conned hard-working Americans out of their hard-won cash to attend his so-called "university."

And we can hope there still remain in the Republican Party at least a few brave politicians who will stand up to Trump, as some did McCarthy. This might be a little harder. For every Mitt Romney and Lindsey Graham who have announced their opposition to Trump, there is a weaselly Paul Ryan, a cynical Mitch McConnell and a passel of fellow travelers up and down the ballot who claim not to like Trump and who may not wholeheartedly endorse him but will vote for him in the name of party unity.

As this headline in *The Huffington Post* aptly put it, "Republicans Are Twisting Themselves Into Pretzels To Defend Donald Trump." Ten GOP senators were interviewed about Trump and his attack on Judge Curiel's Mexican heritage. Most hemmed and hawed about their presumptive nominee.

As Trump "gets to reality on things he'll change his point of view and be, you know, more responsible." That was Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah. Trump's comments were "racially toxic" but "don't give me any pause." That was Tim Scott of South Carolina, the only Republican African-American in the Senate. And Sen. Pat Roberts of Kansas? He said Trump's words were "unfortunate." Asked if he was

offended, Jennifer Bendery writes, the senator “put his fingers to his lips, gestured that he was buttoning them shut, and shuffled away.”

No profiles in courage there. But why should we expect otherwise? Their acquiescence, their years of kowtowing to extremism in the appeasement of their base, have allowed Trump and his nightmarish sideshow to steal into the tent and take over the circus.

Alexander Pope once said that party spirit is at best the madness of the many for the gain of a few. A kind of infection, if you will – a virus that spreads through the body politic, contaminating all. Trump and his ilk would sweep the promise of America into the dustbin of history unless they are exposed now to the disinfectant of sunlight, the cleansing torch of truth. Nothing else can save us from the dark age of unreason that would arrive with the triumph of Donald Trump.

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